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The American Association for the relief  
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# The American Association for the Relief of the Misery of Battle Field.

Report of Rev. Henry W. Holloway, D. D., President  
to Mr. J. Henri Dunant, Secrétaire du "Comité  
Internationale de Secours aux Militaires Blessés."

NEW YORK, 1866.

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II.

**The American Association for the Relief  
of the Misery of Battle Fields.**

Letter of Rev. Henry W. Bellows, D. D., President,  
to M. J. Henri Dunant, Secrétaire du "Comité  
Internationale de Secours aux Militaires Blessés."



NEW YORK, 1866.

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THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE RELIEF OF THE  
MISERY OF BATTLE FIELDS.

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NEW YORK, June 7, 1866.

TO M. J. HENRI DUNANT,

Secrétaire du "Comité Internationale de Secours aux Militaires Blessés,"

GENEVA :

SIR—I have already informed you of the existence of an American Branch of your Comité Internationale, whose constitution, with some sketch of its short history is herewith transmitted. We are in close correspondence with our Government, and earnestly urging the adoption by the United States of the treaty formed at Geneva, August 22, 1864. Difficulties exist which Mr. Seward expresses a hope may be swiftly overcome. We are not a little mortified that America should be among the last powers to come into a convention so creditable to the civilization of the nineteenth century.

Meanwhile our American Association does not wish to be wholly inactive. Composed entirely of gentlemen who participated in the work of the U. S. Sanitary Commission, the American Association feels itself to be the heir of its experience and responsible for the diffusion of the principles and methods which gained for the Sanitary Commission so great and humane a success. At the last meeting of the American Association, letters were read from Italy soliciting instruction from American experience as to the methods so successfully adopted during our late war for the organization of the masses of the people, especially the women, in the relief of the sick and wounded. This Association thought it best to answer these applications through your Comité, and directed its President to address you a letter, giving a comprehensive account of what had been done by the U. S. Sanitary Commission, as, perhaps, the most helpful service it could render to the general cause of humanity, at a moment when so many great nations seem on the brink of a general war. If your Comité judge the views set forth in this letter worthy the attention of the people of Europe, we know that you can give them a circulation which, with your endorsement, would greatly increase their influence.

The chief question proposed to us from Europe has been this: What can the women of a country do to alleviate the misery of battle fields, and to diminish the sufferings of armies in the field? In America, men and women have worked together in this good cause, and with almost equal efficiency. It is impossible to show what the women have done, without describing the general plan which men and women have united in carrying out with such astonishing success.

Before going farther, let me premise that one of the most valuable results of women's work in America, the invigoration of the patriotism of the country, cannot properly enter into an account destined for usefulness to all countries, and all peoples engaged in war. Delightful as it might be to indulge in sympathies with those aspiring peoples struggling for principles dear to all American hearts, I shall deny myself in this communication any political preferences. For in regard to the humanities of battle fields and the duties of those who stay at home to those who are in the field, there can be no ground of national distinction. Where a war offensive or defensive is waged by the lawful authorities of a nation, be it in the cause of right or wrong, it is equally the duty of the homes of the land, to mitigate its horrors, and render its necessary violence, as little barbarous, as so intrinsically cruel a remedy for worse evils, can be made. What chloroform is to surgery, humanity is to war. It does not stop blood shed, but it spares needless suffering. What I might say to Italian women, I should say with equal earnestness to Austrian and to Prussian women. It is your duty, and it is within your power, to soften unspeakably the cruelties and anguish of those who are fighting your battles.

I will first tell you, in the fewest words, what has been done in America by the principal organization which has represented woman's sympathies and work, the U. S. Sanitary Commission, and then describe to you chiefly *how* it has been done.

The U. S. Sanitary Commission has been present, by its agents, or supplies, on five hundred severe battle or bloody skirmish fields ministering to the wounded.

For four years it had in active service a Field Relief Corps, varying from one hundred to seven hundred chosen men.

It has ministered constantly to the needs of the two hundred General Hospitals, (with their 130,000 beds,) and to thousands of Regimental Hospitals.

It has thus distributed clothing and supplies to the value of not less than fifteen million of dollars, (\$15,000,000,) collected through the agency of not less than seven thousand organized Aid Societies scattered through the loyal States.

In its Department of Special Relief, at its forty established "Homes" and "Lodges," dotted from Belle Plain, Va., to Brownsville Texas, and from Paducah to Port Royal, the Commission has given a full million of lodgings, and four and a half million of meals to sick or needy soldiers. At temporary Feeding Stations—on routes of transportation from battle fields to Base Hospitals—on Hospital Cars and Transports, it has furnished at least another million of meals.

At its "Lodges" it has secured for discharged soldiers upon papers received and adjusted, two and a half millions of dollars (\$2,500,000.)

Its Bureau of Claims, extending, by a system of Local Agencies, throughout the whole North and West, has made out the papers, collected the evidence, and filed in the government offices not less than sixty thousand claims of soldiers or of their widows and orphans, representing a money value of not less than seven million four hundred thousands dollars (\$7,400,000.) This has been done without cost to the claimant, thereby saving to the soldiers or their friends, in fees alone, at lowest estimate, over a half million of dollars, in reality probably one and a half million, (\$1,500,000.)

In its Hospital Directory, established to answer the enquiries of friends at home, concerning the sick and wounded, it has recorded one million six hundred thousand names.

It has distributed not less than fifty thousand copies of medical and surgical monographs upon most important subjects among the surgeons of the army.

In its Statistical Bureau it has collected a vast amount of valuable material which will prove a rich contribution to medical and surgical science.

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The correction of "descriptive lists" by the Sanitary Commission has saved a world of trouble to the soldiers.



You will see by this brief statement what an immense work of humane service has been rendered by the people at home, at their own cost and through their own methods, to the soldiers in the field.

The question for you will be what part the women had in this work.

I begin with saying that they had far the largest part in it; but not, I suppose, in the way commonly believed.

The work of organizing and managing the U. S. Sanitary Commission was done by men—civilians of all professions. They arranged a system of coöperation with the Government, and specially with the Medical and Military Staff, the principle of which was, while doing much, to abjure everything that was superfluous, incongruous, injurious to military discipline, or disturbing to the efficiency of the regular army system, everything that the Government could do better, or as well—everything that would release the Government from the least portion of its proper responsibility and watchfulness. This plan involved the recognition by the Government of the Sanitary Commission as a semi-official organization, working at its own expense and according to its own methods: but reporting its plans for approval to the military authorities, and strictly observing in its operations all military rules and medical regulations. Of course, such a plan could not escape some jealousy on the side of the regular military and medical authorities. It involved constant criticism on the part of the Commission of the governmental methods, and frequent remonstrance against the neglect or inadequacy of its provisions for the prevention or the cure of sickness and wounds. But so deeply seated in the affections of the American people and of the army itself did the Commission become, that its work was never interrupted or seriously hindered by any governmental jealousies, while its own sense of the value and importance of its original principles as an association strictly subservient to and coöperative with the governmental system, made it just as scrupulous in the days of its utmost strength as in those of its early weakness never to violate its obligations of strict military subordination. It went through the war not only without contributing a particle of demoralization to the army, but with a steady eye to the increase of military discipline and efficiency.

This success was accomplished wholly by the business like discipline which the Sanitary Commission established within its own organization. It was

composed of a small unpaid volunteer board of patriotic men, who gave for four years the largest part of their time and thoughts to this great business. They met in their Standing Committee every day at New York, and at short intervals at Washington, where their headquarters and central bureau was situated, to devise methods and plans for carrying out, on a national scale, a system of supplementary aid to the whole army, watching over its health and aiming to prevent disease by sanitary suggestions and by anti-scorbutic food and adequate comforts, and endeavoring to relieve its distresses after sickness and wounds had set in, by supplying all the comforts which the Government could not or would not furnish.

To accomplish this work, this board saw that two things were indispensably necessary.

1. The means of obtaining accurate knowledge of the actual state of the army, its camps, its diet, its regimental hospitals; and then, having acquainted itself with its wants, (2) the agency of enough competent persons to apply relief in the shape of knowledge, of remonstrance, of material comfort. The first necessity it met by creating a body of Sanitary Inspectors—medical men paid to devote themselves to a rigid inspection—under permission duly sought and granted from generals and colonels, and surgeons in command—of all regiments, camps, and hospitals. Then it added (2) a corresponding body of relief agents, also paid, who, under strict conditions, the chief of which was the necessity of an official requisition from the surgeon of what was absolutely needed, distributed the stores, food, stimulants, clothing, comforts of every kind, to meet the wants of the well in danger of falling sick, of the sick in peril of their lives.

These inspectors and relief agents as the Army spread, moved with it and became a part of it. They were multiplied to meet the gradual expansion of the army, until they reached at the most active and urgent periods the number of seven hundred chosen men; sometimes falling as low as one hundred, but averaging about four hundred in constant service.

These agents of inspection and supply were divided into corps, corresponding with the several divisions of the army. Each army had its chief inspector, who had control both of the sanitary inspection and of the supplies. Of course, vast depots of supplies had to be fixed at convenient posts, which served

as a base to draw upon. These sub-centres of supply at City Point, Frederick City, Wheeling, Louisville, Chattanooga, New Orleans, Norfolk, off Charleston, &c., sometimes aboard steamers and scows anchored in the streams, and sometimes occupying buildings in towns, and tents in the field, were drawn upon by the neighboring relief stations, which, scattered in every division of the army, were nearly omni-present with the soldiers, and by a steady and systematic oversight, knew and met all their various wants after the Government had exhausted its resources or satisfied its standard.

In the field, the relief stations were of course in tents, under the red flag of the U.S. Sanitary Commission, which was almost as well known in the army as the United States flag itself. It invited all suffering to prefer its claims, but it met those claims only after careful examination of their merit, and according to rules most cautiously adopted.

There was nothing that concerned the medical or sanitary interests of the army that was not commonly to be found under the flag of these relief stations. For the surgeons, careful monographs on every medical, surgical, hygienic topic, written by the most competent men in the country, expressly for their use, and gratuitously distributed, forming, indeed, in the whole, a field library for the regimental surgeons; for the hospitals, warm clothing, fresh sheets and pillow cases, woolen stockings, shirts, drawers, bandages, splints and lint; also, every kind of delicate food and cordial which a well ordered hospital could have in a city; for the men in the field, fresh vegetables, tobacco, changes of under clothing, wholesome and amusing reading, games, and materials for writing home—paper, pens, ink, postage stamps. Here too was sympathy, advice, and a kind of general agency for what could not be done by anybody else or in any other way. Officers, surgeons, men, all found their need at frequent times of appealing to the agents, and homes, and lodges, and stations of the U. S. Sanitary Commission.

One of the most radical and substantial services rendered by the Sanitary Commission was its constant struggle to anticipate the breaking out of scurvy in the army by pouring in fresh vegetables, potatoes, onions, and tomatoes, with fruits, apples, and peaches, both fresh and dried. Thousands of tons of these anti-scorbutics were distributed by the Commission, in some cases actually saving the army from the prospect of general demoralization by sickness. In

this work the farming districts and small producers of the country engaged with all their hearts. Thousands of women, in the absence of their husbands, sons, and brothers, cultivated with their own hands patches of potatoes and onions as gifts for the army. Children were encouraged to carry on little garden spots to the same end. Canned tomatoes and fruits of all kinds, with dried apples and peaches, given by the country people, formed one of the most acceptable and useful gratuities to the soldiers, and the amount furnished is almost incredible. If the common people, and more particularly the women and children, of European countries ask how they can contribute to the comfort of the soldiers in their poverty, let their attention be directed to this part of our American experience.

Besides this general work in the field, the Sanitary Commission had at forty chief military centres throughout the country, other stations which it called Homes and Lodges—places where military estrays—men carelessly dropped by their Regiments, taken sick on the way to and from hospitals, *in transitu* from one command to another, who had lost their papers or their hold on the local military authorities—could find food, rest, nursing, guidance, and be put in the way of getting where they belonged. It was estimated that not less than an average of two thousand men were thus thrown upon our hands daily through the war. Connected with these Homes were arrangements for collecting soldiers' back pay and claims free of charge—a business which grew to vast proportions, and rendered incalculable service. At least sixty thousand claims have thus passed through our hands. Of course it was impossible to carry on this business without wagons, horses, store-houses, and immense transportation by railroads and by steamers. The United States Government offered the Commission great facilities, lending it many government vessels, the use of hundreds of army wagons, and much free transportation. Many of the railroad lines, the steam companies on rivers, and the telegraph lines extended costly privileges to the Commission. But notwithstanding the indispensableness of these vast gratuities, the very times when the aid of the Commission was most imperatively required were when the pressure upon all government transportation was too severe to allow any room for a pound of this volunteer freight, and, therefore, the chief cost and labor of transporting its own stores had to be done

independently, in steamers of its own, by wagons of its own, or at its own cost, through express companies.

Having explained, in a very imperfect way, the nature and extent of the work of the Sanitary Commission to the army, and the agencies by which it was effected, I proceed now to explain what must already have begun to excite your curiosity—how it obtained the money and the supplies necessary to carry on a work which extended over a territory of many thousand miles square, and involved, more or less, the extra military wants of between two and three million of soldiers. How were the fifteen million of dollars' worth of supplies which the Sanitary Commission distributed brought together in their hands, and how were the five million dollars of money in cash collected? Without these supplies, of course the machinery of depots, wagons, steamers, and agents would have been like a costly aqueduct without a drop of water in its reservoirs or pipes; and without cash in hand, the aqueduct itself never could have been built or maintained.

1. The money was the fruit of appeals made through the press to the public, by the Sanitary Commission. The Commission, by reason of a better acquaintance with the general subject of army wants, by strength of the personal character of most of the men connected with it, and by the evidences of zeal and competency which it gave, soon was able to enlist the confidence and general coöperation of the public, so far as to make itself the chief channel through which the pecuniary liberality of the public flowed. Announcing definite and well-considered plans at a period when only somewhat vague and sentimental notions of usefulness prevailed, it served as a rallying point, about which the judicious, who wished their money to tell effectively, gathered, and it soon took a position of such commanding character, as to make it the first choice of all who were thinking of a vehicle of pecuniary aid to the army. This disposition was encouraged by public meetings, addresses by the officers of the Society, careful appeals by circulars and in the columns of newspapers, and by establishing associate memberships in all the monetary centres, where committees of leading and trusted men received or collected money for the Commission. As the work increased and the claims of the Commission became more imperative and more obvious, great Fairs were started in all the chief cities of the Union, from which not less than three millions of dollars accrued

to its treasury. In these fairs, started usually by women and managed chiefly by them, the whole industry of the country was represented. All classes, commercial, mechanical, agricultural, artistic, and domestic, vied with each other in adding to their materials. They were vast Bazaars, in which the charm, of spectacle, of crowds, and of endless variety were combined, and where the very people who gave the goods on sale came again to buy back oftentimes their own gifts. Finally, California and the Pacific coast, too distant to participate directly in the war, made a specialty of looking after the sick and wounded soldiers, and adopted the Commission as their almoner, pouring a million and a half of money into its treasury. So much for the sources of the money support of the Commission.

2. The supplies, which at a moderate valuation, are estimated at fifteen millions of dollars, were the grandest contribution of the country to the Sanitary Commission, and they came chiefly from the women of the land. Without them, the money would have gone only a very little way towards accomplishing the object in view.

At the very opening of the war, there started up all over the country little societies, anxious to make lint, bandages, hospital clothing, and delicate food for the soldiers. Of course, when these societies started, each sent what it made with the company or regiment that went from its own neighborhood. But after the men actually got into the field, particular regiments and companies became untraceable, and separate communities could not be at the expense, even if they had understood the method, of following them hundreds of miles, with agents encumbered with bulky boxes of supplies.

It was the business of the Sanitary Commission to organize these spontaneous movements into a common plan. To persuade the towns to contribute to county societies, and the counties to contribute to State societies, and the State societies to resolve themselves into branches, tributary to the National Society. The plan worked admirably. Into about twenty branches, established at Portland, Boston, Providence, Hartford, New Haven, New York, Albany, Buffalo, Cleveland, Chicago, Detroit, Milwaukee, Cincinnati, Columbus, Pittsburg, Louisville, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and elsewhere, there poured, not always according to State lines, but according to convenience of

transportation, the labor of over seven thousand Soldiers' Aid Societies—most of them working systematically during the whole four years of the war.

It was the business of the Branches, controlled and managed by women who developed extraordinary talents for business, to acquaint themselves with the distributing methods of the Sanitary Commission, which, by regular correspondence and visitation, kept them informed in all the necessary detail of what was wanted from the societies, what became of the supplies, and the evidence of the skill, economy, and success with which they were distributed to hospitals and to the men at the front. From time to time, the leading women in these Branches, met in council at Washington to concert plans, receive new inspiration, and acquire a more thorough and personal acquaintance with the supply work of the Commission.

From the Branches, proceeded a steady correspondence with the towns, either with existing Soldiers' Aid Societies, or with individuals who were urged to form them. The Branches sent either their own members as missionaries to the most backward towns, or employed canvassers, generally army Chaplains, or invalided officers, who held public meetings and formed new societies, or encouraged those already existing to new exertions. The Soldiers' Aid Societies were supplied monthly with a bulletin, published by the Sanitary Commission, a pamphlet of twenty-four pages, giving the reports of agents in the hospitals and on the battle fields, and stimulating with fresh and direct facts the hearts and hands of the people at home. Each Aid Society met, perhaps, regularly once a week to sew for the soldiers. But the members took the work home with them to finish, and hundreds of thousands of women probably never allowed one secular day of the whole war to pass without setting some stitches for the soldiers! By this steady and systematic labor, wonders were accomplished. The women called upon the storekeepers to give goods, cottons, and flannels; on the rich to give money, wherewith to buy materials; on the old to knit stockings, on the children to hem handkerchiefs, while they themselves cut out and made up sheets, shirts, and drawers, and concocted cordials and jellies. These duly packed, were sent (oftentimes or usually at the expense of the Railroad Companies,) to the principal depot, probably one, and sometimes three hundred miles off. There, those boxes from the various towns were all opened; their contents assorted, marked with the stamp of the Commission,

and repacked, and held ready to be sent to any point to which the General Secretary at Washington might direct.

The labor, the patience, the system with which for four years the work was done at the Branches and in the Aid Societies, proved not only the admirable capacity for business, which usually slumbers in women, but the steadiness of principle, to which their admirable impulses may be trained, and their capacity for comprehending and coöperating in the largest and most impersonal plans.

It was in the Soldiers' Aid Societies in their own towns, and in the Branches in which they converged in the cities of the North and West, that the women of the country, rendered their immense service to the National struggle and to the army. The hive of humane industry was as wide as the loyal portion of the Nation. It might almost be said that all the women of the land were engaged in it. It broke down all party and all sectarian distinctions. It even obliterated the usual lines of good and bad, generous and stingy, active and slothful, rich and poor. All American women, not compelled to labor for their daily bread—and many of these—contributed to the U. S. Sanitary Commission. Thus it was in great part that the spirit of the country was kept up, the connection between the soldiers and their homes maintained, the people informed of what went on in the field and the hospital, and their sympathies always kept warm and flowing.

There were comparatively few women who went into the field hospitals, and they were considered in the way, with a few rare exceptions, where tact and humanity were united with force and endurance. Nor was it in the base hospitals, nor in the general hospitals even, that the characteristic work of the American women was done. A few admirable women, volunteers, were put by surgeons, in charge of diet kitchens, or in partial charge of a hospital ward, or permitted to act as nurses, and illustrious services were thus rendered. But while a few hundred such persons might be named—only a few of whom were really very useful—certainly not less than many hundred thousand women were engaged in making and forwarding supplies. And that is the direction, in which in all countries, the women should be invited to labor. Detailed men are the appropriate nurses in military hospitals. Women are rarely in place at the front, or even at the base of armies. But their serviceableness cannot be measured, when they systematically devote themselves, as they did in America,



through a whole war, to ministering by their industry and by their substantial messages of comfort, to the wants of the sick and wounded.

It is difficult, of course, to apply experience drawn from a democratic society, such as we enjoy in America, to other countries. But remembering what I saw in Italy in 1848, when every village and every house seemed alive with patriotic zeal and self-sacrifice, I cannot doubt that the women of Italy may be organized into a great National Association, furnishing supplies to some Central Volunteer Society, at Florence, such as the Sanitary Commission was at Washington during our war, and the same is probably true of Austria and Prussia.

Let me add a few words drawn from our experience, to the patriotic men, who, in any of the belligerent countries, may be banding themselves together to supplement the governmental service towards the sick and wounded. I speak of the Central Committee. Good intentions and humane sentiments are not alone adequate qualifications for this duty. A large acquaintance with military operations, a sympathy with the military spirit, a knowledge of sanitary science and of medicine, combined with administrative skill, tact, patience, ceaseless labor, and fertility in resources, all are necessary to full success. Add the entire confidence of the country for integrity, good sense, and zeal. The final victory of such a committee will be due to the carefulness of its original constitution, the judicious selection of the men who compose it. It ought not to consist of more than a dozen members; and they should, every one of them, be working men, unpaid volunteers, men of middle age, and capable of persistent labor.

Their agents, on the contrary, inspectors and relief agents should not be volunteers, but *paid* employés. Without this, neither discipline, method, nor continuity of plan can be secured. Volunteer agents are the dearest that can be used. These agents must be selected with great care, and must be good, true, and capable men, humane and self-denying.

The first attention of the committee should be given to the consideration of the state of the existing Medical Department of the army. A hundred times as much depends upon the energy, spirit, and humanity of this regular medical service, as upon all that any outside semi-official or volunteer aid can render. To know how competent, how broad in views, how well prepared with hospital

supplies and with hospital buildings, how furnished with transportation, how exalted in standard the regular medical staff of a country is, is to have the first ground of judging how much is going to be needed from the people. And, indeed, the first duty of a committee of relief is to arouse public attention and to call governmental solicitude to this question. If old, effete, time-hardened men, not animated by modern science or modern humanity are in control of the Army Medical Department in a country about engaging in war, the first thing to be done is to call on the government with a voice of thunder to change the officers in charge and put middle-aged and modern men of character, ability, and zeal at the head of medical affairs.

The next thing is to concentrate the feeling of the country into one channel of supplementary aid; to discourage variety and rivalry, local pride and devotion to special commands. Volunteer aid to be acceptable in an army must be administered by a few skilful hands, trained to military etiquette and routine. Many rival associations represented in the field, prejudice the officers against all. Favoritism to special corps, brigades, and regiments is also injurious. It can be avoided by issuing all supplies from a common depot, with impartial care, just where they are needed, and only there. Superfluous aid is injurious and merely useless. Soldiers are injured by being cosseted. Sentimental views of their wants are hurtful.

Exact and thoroughly reliable information obtained with the utmost care as to the actual state of the soldiers, both in camp, after battle, and in hospitals, is worth more than the most stirring appeals as a means of securing the public sympathy and assistance. Exaggeration, extravagance, and sentimentality are all fatal to permanent influence.

It is, however, useless to expect correct information on the wants of the soldier from the Government, or the Medical Bureau, or even the General Officers. The last thing to which a government attends in an active war is the sick and wounded. The medical is the least interesting bureau to it, and as a rule army surgeons have hard and coarse views of humanity to soldiers. General officers seldom see with their own eyes the details of want and suffering. It is only through the Inspectors, who represent the committee, or through its own eyes, that it will actually know what is the condition of the hospitals, and especially of the field and regimental hospitals, and the camps and diet.

But it will not answer to draw out further this unexpectedly protracted letter. I send it in all its roughness, as a hasty contribution, made from a not hasty experience, to the cause of Humanity in War, hoping that wherever it may have the good fortune to reach, it may speak of the oneness of America and Europe in all that touches the permanent interests and triumphs of Christian charity and universal brotherhood.

I am, very respectfully,

Your obedient servant,

HENRY W. BELLOWS,

President of the U. S. Sanitary Commission.

President of the American Association for the Relief of  
the Misery of Battle Fields.

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